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THE BASIS OF REALISM

"THE Program and First Platform of Six Realists," which appeared in this JOURNAL last July,¹ gives expression to a growing movement in philosophy in a way which deserves the gratitude of all who are in sympathy with that movement. As I find myself in almost complete agreement with the "six realists," I have thought it might be desirable to attempt on my own account a somewhat similar statement of my philosophical opinions.

The fundamental doctrine in the realistic position, as I understand it, is the doctrine that relations are "external." This doctrine is not correctly expressed by saying that two terms which have a certain relation might have not had that relation. Such a statement introduces the notion of possibility and thus raises irrelevant difficulties. The doctrine may be expressed by saying that (1) relatedness does not imply any corresponding complexity in the *relata*; (2) any given entity is a constituent of many different complexes. Each of these propositions requires some expansion.

1. The view which is intended to be denied by this proposition is the view that, whenever a term *a* has a certain relation *R* to a certain other term *b*, that implies some element in *a* in virtue of which it has the relation *R* to *b*. It is usual in this connection to speak rather of the "nature" of *a* than of *a*, and it is not clear whether the "nature" of *a* is or is not identical with *a*; but in any case, this "nature," according to the view we are denying, is complex, and contains a constituent which expresses or accounts for *a*'s relation to *b*. Writers who advocate the view in question do not state what they mean by the "nature" of *a*. Three views may be suggested: (α) We may suppose that the "nature" of *a* is identical with *a*. In this case, we affirm, on the basis of a *reductio ad absurdum*, that the contention that *a*'s "nature" must contain a constituent which expresses or accounts for *a*'s relation to *b*, is demonstrably false. (β) We may suppose that *a*'s "nature" is all the propositions that are true of *a*, or all the complexes of which *a* is a constituent. In this case, the view in question becomes a truism, but fails to yield any of the consequences commonly deduced from it. (γ) We may define the "nature" of *a* as its predicates or attributes, as opposed to its relations. This view requires a word of explanation. We are accustomed to dyadic, triadic, tetradic . . . relations. A dyadic relation may be defined as one which *can* occur in propositions containing only two other terms, *i. e.*, as one such that the simplest propositions in which it occurs contain only two other terms. Similar defi-

¹ Vol. VII., No. 15, pp. 393-401.

nitions apply to triadic, tetradic . . . relations. Now there may also be—I do not say there are—what we may call *monadic* concepts, *i. e.*, concepts which can occur in propositions having only one other term. Such concepts may be called predicates or attributes. It is of course the case that, whenever a subject has a predicate, there is a dyadic relation of subject and predicate, but it does not follow that there is not also a proposition in which the predicate is merely predicated. The analogy of dyadic relations will make this clearer. Whenever a has the relation R to b , there is a triadic relation of a and R and b , but in this relation R occurs as a term of the relation, not as the relating relation of the proposition. Similarly, if there are monadic concepts, the propositions in which they are said to have the relation of predication to their subjects will not be identical with the propositions in which they are actually predicated. Assuming, then, that there are monadic concepts, the “nature” of a may consist of all those monadic concepts which are predicable of a . Then the view that a ’s “nature” contains a constituent which expresses or accounts for a ’s relation to b will be the view that there is a monadic concept predicable of whatever has the said relation to b and of nothing else. More generally, the view in question may be stated as follows: “Every propositional function of one variable is formally equivalent to some monadic propositional function,” where a monadic propositional function is one which attributes a monadic concept to a variable subject. It is no concern of the doctrine of external relations either to affirm or deny the above view, though we must contend that there is no reason to suppose the above view to be true. We must, however, deny that a term is composed of all the monadic concepts which are predicable of it, *i. e.*, that a particular subject is identical with the sum of its predicates.

I do not for a moment wish to suggest that any one of the above three views (α), (β), (γ), is held by any of the opponents of external relations. They, I believe, hold a confused mixture of all three, and would not continue their opposition if the confusion were removed. My purpose in setting forth the above three views was to make it clear what it is that I affirm, and what it is that I deny. The view I advocate is, that a term a may have a relation to a term b without there being any constituent of a corresponding to this relation. If this were false, simple terms could have no relations, and therefore could not enter into complexes; hence every term would have to be strictly infinitely complex.

2. Authors who deny external relations hold, in addition to the doctrine discussed above, that it is impossible for precisely the same term to be a constituent of two different complexes, or to occur in two different propositions. They say that if A is the father of B and

the son of C, it is not strictly the same entity which is father and son, but that it is "A *quâ* father of B" who is the father of B, and "A *quâ* son of C" who is the son of C. This doctrine also is denied by those who advocate external relations. They would argue that "A *quâ* father of B" is a complex containing the constituent A, and "A *quâ* son of C" is also a complex containing the constituent A. Thus the attempt to avoid an identical constituent in two complexes breaks down. The two parts of the doctrine of external relations together constitute the justification of analysis, and the denial of the view that analysis is falsification.

The importance of the question as to the value of relations lies in the fact that current arguments against realism and pluralism almost all depend upon the doctrine of internal relations. When this doctrine is rejected, the question as to the number of things that exist becomes purely empirical, but no empirical fact is more certain, if *a priori* refutations fail, than that many things exist. I should therefore prefer to call the philosophy which I advocate "pluralism" rather than "realism," because realism, in most of its accepted uses, involves long and difficult arguments which might be rejected without contravening anything that was said above as to the nature of relations. Nevertheless, if any case is to be made out against this or that form of realism on the basis of external relations, it will have to be a new case, based upon quite different arguments from those hitherto employed by idealists. I do not myself believe that any such case can be made out; at the same time, all the questions involved seem to me to demand fresh discussion, and what seems to me so far firmly established is a logic and a method, rather than any positive metaphysical results. What is plain is that all arguments based on the contention that knowing makes a difference to what is known, or implies a community or interaction between knower and known, rest upon the internal view of relations, and therefore fail when this view is rejected. It is true there is another argument for idealism, namely, the argument which Professor Perry calls the "egocentric predicament." This argument is, in brief, that everything must be known, because we can not know of anything else. This is a foolish fallacy, which would equally prove that I must be acquainted with everybody whose name is Smith. Sometimes, more plausibly, it is urged merely that we can not know that there are things we do not know; but this view rests upon a wrong analysis of general propositions, in fact upon the same wrong analysis which led Mill to regard Barbara as a *petitio principii*. When we know a general proposition, that does not require that we should know all or any of the instances of it. "All the multiplication-sums that never have been and never will be thought of by any

human being deal with numbers over 1,000'' is obviously a true proposition, although no instance of such a sum can ever be given. It is therefore perfectly possible to know that there are propositions we do not know, in spite of the fact that we can give no instance of such a proposition. Thus it is fallacious not merely to argue that everything must be known, but even to argue that we can not know that there are things which we do not know. This instance, like many others, illustrates the elementary blunders which philosophers have made owing to their neglect of logic.

To sum up: The primary philosophic effect of the logical doctrines which I share with the "six realists" seems to me mainly negative: it shows that most current philosophical argument is fallacious, and that many questions which have been supposed amenable to a *a priori* treatment must be dealt with empirically, since logic leaves the alternatives undecided. At the same time, in all those matters in which philosophy has been led to contravene science and common sense, there is a presumption, if the arguments of philosophers have been unsound, that their conclusions have been false; hence the logic in question naturally associates itself with pluralism and realism rather than with monism and idealism. Moreover, by the rejection of *a priori* constructions the way is opened for philosophy to become inductive, and to begin the patient cooperative accumulation of results by which the triumphs of science have been achieved.

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REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS OF LITERATURE

Mysticism in Modern Mathematics. HASTINGS BERKELEY. Oxford University Press. 1910. Pp. 258.

The title of this work will, to many, appear wantonly paradoxical. Mathematics, above all branches of knowledge, is usually credited with the attributes of absolute certainty and of logical precision. Nevertheless, Mr. Berkeley successfully maintains that it contains elements not incor- rectly described by the term mystical. The term requires definition. Mr. Berkeley's meaning will be gathered from the following passage.

"What are we to think of, how shall we characterize, a mental process which might, briefly and in general terms, be indicated thus: Explanation of the derivation, from a primary conception (say that of quantity, or again, of space), of another conception, followed by questions such as these: What is, or what is the nature of, this derived conception? Or—say that Abracadabra is the name of the derived conception—What is the meaning of Abracadabra? The questions imply that the nature of a